

Why a Women's Liberation Movement?*

"Stop that frantic interest in the Women's Liberation Movement! Rise, unite, but concentrate on a more important issue such as the political dissensions which afflict your country and tear it into pieces!"

This call came from a sociologist who sometimes participated in the editing of IWSAW publications and became exceedingly worried about the spread of terrorism and the menace of complete disruption in Lebanon.

While I shared his worry, I tried to show him that our work for women's liberation can go on, even in war time, jointly with the task of liberating our country.

The Lebanese war was started by a group of men enslaved by their own passions as well as by outside contradictory ideologies. Women, as a whole, have acted as slaves to men. They have been passive spectators or submissive followers. Liberating them from ignorance and blind submission is doubly important because they have been subjected to a double form of slavery. It is the task of the Women's Liberation Movement to make unprivileged women conscious of their rights and needs and to shake off the self centeredness of the privileged as well as to sensitize them to the needs of their environment.

In war time, liberated women are able to play an important role. While men fight against each other, the women's movement can be a model of unity. In fact, as members of the Red Cross and other international organizations, they have shown their ability to join hands in spite of sectarianism. As mothers, sisters and teachers of the young, they can spread ideas of service, forgiveness, patriotism and humanitarianism. Instead of mechanical repetition of men's slogans and bitter declarations, they may give them a lesson in good will and objectivity.

Women, acting together as a group, may be a factor of reconciliation and mutual understanding, not only in their own country but also with the women of neighbouring and far away countries, through correspondence, international conferences and exchanging publications. Formulating these links was indeed the ultimate purpose for the creation of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and other similar institutes in various parts of Asia, fifteen years ago.

For a number of years, I have been in the habit of listening every morning to a 5 minute program broadcasted by a Western station under the title of "Reflections". The daily program is given by writers, thinkers, and religious leaders, representing various creeds, races and nations in East and West, yet all the speakers insist on peace and understanding despite differences in affiliation. The program has not solved the problems of the world but it shows that, while dissensions exist everywhere there are still certain individuals and groups who are working for peaceful solutions of world differences. Anyone suffering from injustice or working for it should not feel alone in the struggle.

Communication is a most important source of enrichment and guidance, why not take advantage of this tool?

The advice given by the sociologist at the beginning of this editorial should be a call for women's unity with the aim of liberating themselves and, consequently, their country.

By liberty, we do not mean irrational conduct or the freedom to harm one's self or others, but the freedom to think, to speak, to plan, away from the despotism of stereotypes and dishonest leaders. Without freedom as a goal, a union may become a form of slavery.

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(* This question was discussed from a different point of view in an editorial of *Al-Raida*, May 1, 1981, Vol. IV, No. 16